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TOO LATE.

By Frances Henshaw Baden.

"That boy has never caused me a moment's sorrow, or an anxious thought, since his baby days," said a friend to me a year ago, pointing to a lad of about eighteen years, who, with several others, was playing a game of ball. His laugh was the loudest, the merriest of all. The father's remark made me particularly attentive to the boy. I watched him with great interest. His blue eyes were like a child's—full of fun, clear and honest. The brown hair was thrown back from a forehead, high, broad and smooth. These were his best features, for he was not handsome—not near so handsome as others around him.

The game was over, and a few moments after the youth joined us, was presented to me, and then turned again to his father and said:

"I am going home with one of the boys, if you do not wish me to remain here."

"Certainly; go, my boy. Will Julian go too?"

"I do not know, sir. Can I do anything for you first?"

"Thank you; no, my son." Placing his hand caressingly on him, the father smiled his boy away.

"We call him Benny. When I gave him the name of Benjamin the folks did not like the old-fashioned name. But I did not mind; I insisted on it. And when he was baptised, I prayed that he might be a good man—a comfort to our old age. Ay, and how fully God has answered my prayer! My good boy, Benjamin! 'Son of my right hand!'"

"Your only one?" I asked.

"No. Oh, no; there is one other—Julian."

"And he?"

"Not like Benny. Oh, no! But the apple of his mother's eye—her darling," answered the father, with a grave face.

"Then to his mother he is surely a comfort, or she would not love him thus."

"He loves her, in his way. But, oh, do you not know mothers often love those most who are the most unworthy—that cause them the greatest sorrow?"

I did know, but cared not to admit it.

"There he is."

I followed the direction of the father's gaze, and saw, seated under a tree, a youth that looked older than Benny.

"How handsome!" I exclaimed. He was the handsomest youth I had ever seen.

A forehead high and smooth—not broad and full like his brother's—from which the hair was thrown back in black, silken waves. Beautiful, classical features, and eyes that should have been a girl's—large, dark and soft; beautiful, deceiving eyes!

"How very, *very* handsome!" I repeated, and thought, "Wilful, wayward, and wicked, I fear."

"He is handsome, and I fear that will be a curse. For that fatal gift he has been petted, caressed, and humoured in every whim; while Benny, though older by two years, comes off always second best, except in his father's heart," the father said; and looking again on his handsome boy, he added, "Yet he is affectionate." And then a look came in his eyes, first of regret, followed by another, anxious and fearful.

Friends joining us then, the conversation ceased, and I saw no more of the boys for many months. They returned to college. Occasionally I met my friend, their father; but the subject was never resumed. It was painful to speak of *one*, I knew, and therefore avoided it.

I was on the eve of going to visit some relatives in a city, in which these youths were pursuing their studies. I told my friend of my proposed visit, and he begged me to go and see his boys.

I promised, and did so. This was the second time I had seen them. This occasion was impressed more forcibly on my mind than the other, and my heart was filled with great anxiety, dark forebodings.

I carried with me an invitation from my sister, for the boys to attend an entertainment that evening. Benny seemed much pleased, and readily accepted the invitation.

Julian declined, urging in excuse a previous engagement.

He had changed much in the past months, and his looks told plainly of late hours and sleepless nights, not spent in study. His beautiful eyes were no longer clear, and in them I saw the traces of the wine cup.

"Do come, Jule! As we have holiday this afternoon, you can go, get excused, and be with us in the evening. Do," pleaded Benny.

"No; impossible," answered Julian, positively.

"Whom is your engagement with, Jule?"

The youth must surely have been off his guard, for the reply, "Fred Marvel," caused Benny to turn pale and compress his lips. Drawing his brother a little apart, he spoke low but earnestly, beseechingly to him. I own I strained every nerve to hear, for I was interested in the youth.

"Julian, O do not go with him to-night. I know where he will take you. Think of mother and father! Spare their hearts this additional blow!"

"I've promised, and a man of honour cannot break his word."

"Oh, brother, have you forgotten the promise made to the loved ones at home? Think particularly of our mother—your mother, for you are more to her than I—think of her, and come with me," pleaded Benny.

"Oh stop! You are such an old fogy, Ben! What is the harm of seeing a little of the world? The 'old man' will never know it, and neither will mother. So stop preaching and go on, you old croaker!"

"Julian, do not speak of father so. Oh, I would give everything I have in the world to keep you away from there. Jule, you want my horse; you may have Onward, if you'll come with me."

"Oh, pshaw. Indeed I cannot. Go on. Besides, mother has promised to buy 'Lady Fair' for me when I go home."

"Mother keeps her promises to her son, and he breaks his to her; and will, I fear, in time, break her heart!" said Benny, sadly.

"Go on! If you don't, I'll get angry."

My heart was aching for the good son, the earnest, anxious brother. As he followed with me, he looked so sad, and I said: "Perhaps your fears are groundless?"

"No, no; he goes with a gambler to-night."

His voice was trembling so he could scarcely speak, and I hastened to draw his thoughts away, if possible.

Once more I stood beside the youths. A week after, when I returned home I was greeted with the sad tidings of the extreme illness of Mrs. Aylmer, Benny and Julian's mother.

"Some terrible shock she received, we cannot imagine what. The servants say she received a letter, in Mr. Aylmer's absence, intended for him. She opened and read it, and fell lifeless to the floor," I was told.

She had long been suffering with some trouble of the heart, I knew.

The next morning I sent a servant to inquire how she was. He returned, telling that Mrs. Aylmer had died a few moments previous to his reaching the house.

"Are the boys home?" I anxiously inquired.

"Mr. Benjamin is. He arrived in the early train."

"In time?"

"Yes, madam; a few hours previous."

Oh, where was Julian? Why could not the best loved have been with the dying mother?

In the afternoon I went to see the bereaved family. Oh, theirs was surely a terrible bereavement!

'Tis hard to give the aged loved one up. But that wife and mother was young, gifted and beautiful. Taken so soon, so fearfully!

When I entered, Benny stood beside the lovely form. He was very pale, but calm. No bursts of sorrow escaped his lips; no pangs of anguish rent his heart. No, no. As he spoke to me of her, his lips quivered, and tears stole gently down, as once or twice he stooped to kiss, first the brow, and then the hands of the beautiful dead.

Benjamin had no cause for such anguish as I witnessed later. No; his heart was free from regrets. Never by one act had he given sorrow to his mother's heart. He had received her parting blessing. On his head her hand had rested, as she whispered:

"My good son. God bless little Benny!"

"She seemed to be thinking of me in my baby days," he said, when relating this to me.

While I still stood gazing on the coffined face the door opened, and Julian rushed in, pale, terrified, and threw himself across his mother's coffin, laid his head on her cold bosom, and groaned:

"Oh, my God, this is too hard! Mother, mother, why could not you have been spared? My beautiful loving mother! Oh, I never dreamed of this! I never thought you could die! Mother, mother, I loved you; oh, I loved you! I would give my very life to bring you back! Cannot you whisper one little word, 'Forgive?' If I could only recall the past—the dreadful past. Too late, too late!"

On and on he talked, praying for forgiveness. And then Benny drew him away, and in a few moments returned saying:

"He has a more terrible blow yet to bear. I tried to spare him it, but father thinks it must be. Perhaps it may save him.

"I will tell you, for you will surely hear it. That night, you remember, when I pleaded with him to come with us? It was as I feared. He was there until a late hour, and then—then carried out to the college crazed with wine. I never dreamed the President would send the dreadful news home, but he did. Mother opened the letter in father's absence. She read it, and her heart broke. We were telegraphed to come home; Julian would not. He thought mother was not dangerously ill. She was looking for him when she sank into the last sleep."

Scarcely had Benjamin ceased when a groan came from the next room—a groan bitter, terrible, heart-rending—from the miserable youth. I think he will be saved; I hope so. But at what a fearful cost!

In the future he may grow great, for he is rarely gifted. He will be admired, flattered, courted. But will that stop the ceaseless regrets? Society, the world, may praise and render him homage. But, oh! what is all that to those words, "God bless *my good* son," from a dying mother's lips? Yes, he would give all, everything, for those blessed words. Too late—too late! 'Tis past, the time for that! In another's ear, sinking to his very heart, will come, in the future, words worth all the world's proudest gifts: "My good son—'son of my right hand'—God bless *thee*, as thou hast me!"